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Richmond/Hampton Roads Passenger Rail Study Reaches Key Milestone Federal Review Process Underway

Richmond, Va., August 23, 2005 –The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), is entering the federal review process to evaluate two build alternatives for higher speed passenger rail service between Hampton Roads and Richmond. Possible options have been narrowed from four alternatives to two for the service that will ultimately connect Virginia to the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor.

“We have been working for the past 18 months to identify the top alternatives for more detailed analysis,” said Winston Phillips, DRPT project manager. “These two options will be closely evaluated to determine the best solution for passenger rail transportation between Richmond and Hampton Roads.”

“With gasoline and jet fuel costs rising at alarming rates and the increasing highway congestion between Richmond and Hampton Roads, the demand for regional transportation choices will continue to grow. Passenger rail service can help meet that demand by providing an affordable and competitive travel alternative, particularly in corridors of less than 500 miles,” said DRPT Director Karen Rae.

Projected ridership for the proposed service is estimated between 600,000 to 700,000 passenger trips per year by 2025. Cost estimates will be determined based on the environmental review process, discussions with railroad owners and final engineering.

Comments from the public and the study’s Technical Working Group contributed to the report that brought the two most viable alternatives to the forefront: the Peninsula/CSXT Alternative and the Southside/Norfolk Southern Alternative. Each offers the addition of several daily round trips between Richmond and Hampton Roads, as well as reduced travel time. To view the Draft Alternatives Development Report online, visit www.rich2hrrail.info/pages/mp_reports.html.

Two alternatives were eliminated due to higher costs associated with building a new railroad bridge across the James River and significant new track construction, in addition to proposed highway improvement constraints.

The next step for the Richmond/Hampton Roads Passenger Rail Study is to develop a Tier I Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Scheduled for completion in early 2006, the DEIS is an overview of environmental impacts with possible mitigation options for each alternative. The public will be invited to review and comment on the report through a public hearings process and online.

To learn more about the Richmond/Hampton Roads Passenger Rail Study, visit www.rich2hrrail.info.

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About the Alternatives

- ***Peninsula/CSXT Alternative.*** This alternative generally follows the CSX Transportation rail line between Richmond and Newport News. It would connect to the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor at Richmond. The line is located on the north side of the James River, between the river and Interstate 64. The existing Amtrak service between Richmond and Newport News currently operates along this route with bus service from Newport News to Norfolk and Virginia Beach. Three stops would be associated with this alternative: Richmond's Main Street Station, Williamsburg, and a new Newport News Downtown Station. Each station could include enhanced parking facilities.
- ***Southside/Norfolk Southern Alternative.*** This route generally parallels US Route 460. It would use the Norfolk Southern right-of-way/track and would connect to the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor at Petersburg. Four stops are associated with this alternative: Richmond's Main Street Station, Petersburg Station, Bowers Hill, and a Norfolk Downtown Station. Each station could include enhanced parking facilities.
- ***"No-Build" Alternative:*** The "No-Build" option consists of the existing transportation network and committed highway, rail, and airport improvements in the Richmond to Hampton Roads Corridor. Nothing additional would be planned or constructed. This alternative provides a basis for evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the two Build Alternatives.

About the Richmond/Hampton Roads Passenger Rail Study

The Richmond/Hampton Roads Passenger Rail Study is tasked with exploring the feasibility of higher speed passenger rail access between Richmond and the Hampton Roads region with linkages to other cities and states to the north and south. The study is being conducted through the mechanism of an Alternatives Analysis and Environmental Impact Statement to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

About DRPT

The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) facilitates the movement of people and goods throughout Virginia. Through rail, public transportation and commuter services, DRPT focuses on congestion relief, economic development and mobility. DRPT's mission is to plan, establish, maintain, improve and promote public transportation services, passenger and freight rail transportation systems, and transportation demand management strategies that provide efficient mobility and transportation choices for people and businesses in the Commonwealth. Visit us at www.drpt.virginia.gov.

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